

Communication and Transparency

FishNET has been a forum for what appears a somewhat limited audience as the contributors are for the most part the same people. I attempt to bring attention to issues through this forum, as well as send emails out to a large list of other license holders, processors and NGO's. Most of the responses I get are positive, but few advisors on the various advisory boards offer any debate. In fact, I know little about what is taking place behind their closed doors.

As I have pointed out in the past, license holders, processors, service providers, and under the present system, advisors all depend on the fishery for our existence. We are not just Halibut fishermen, Salmon fishermen, Prawn fishermen, trollers, gillnetters or sport fishermen, we are all just fishermen depending on some or all of the fisheries resources for our livelihoods. By treating each license, species, area or interest independently, we have allowed a process that removes management consistency and any form of acquiring consensus on bigger issues.

As the communication process does not flow from the advisory process or from DFO to the industry, it has become the impossible task of searching for information rather than receiving it. Without a process to distribute timely information to the industry there is a huge gap in communication and transparency, which eliminates the ability for any industry dependant individual or non-government organization to plan, advise or function feasibly within this process. The consequences are that advisors are stuck with Terms Of Reference that do not allow advisories beyond the singular interest, and so the focus becomes limited to individual interests of the advisors, often at the expense of the industry as a whole.

For example, if an individual wants to purchase a species license or area license to insure continuing economic viability, until he has actually acquired the license he will not be informed of any regulations or license changes taking place that might remove the economic benefits he may have anticipated and make the license worthless.

This single-focused process needs to be reformed along with the communication and transparency issues. There is currently a process taking place to reform the Groundfish Advisory, but are the Groundfish license holders aware of this or is it just the advisors? As there is no requirement or mechanism in place for advisors or the DFO to keep industry informed, and as there is no requirement for NGO's to keep the industry informed of their lobbying efforts, we need to reform the entire process. We have the opportunity to improve the current dysfunctional advisory process and I have some suggestions that I believe will improve all facets:

1. That the process provides a mechanism for complete transparency within and between all advisory and lobbying processes;
2. that all advisories be required to follow Rules Of Order, which provides a mechanism for consensus;
3. that a communication network be established within the DFO to send via email or regular mail, as necessary, agendas prior to all meetings, as well as minutes from all advisory processes to all industry participants, including those who indicate an interest in that forum;
4. that all non-government lobbying be transparent and all meetings, processes and initiatives be provided to all industry interests from inception through development;
5. that this forum provides a process for interaction of individual opinions and advice on all matters pertaining to fisheries interests.
6. that ultimately an advisory process be developed to provide access to representation for all interested parties, with a mandate to establish goals and requirements and a process to evaluate achievements; and

7. that this advisory be empowered through legislation to make policy and be provided funding to achieve these goals.

The issue of funding, or the lack of commitment by governments to live up to its responsibly to manage fisheries, always seems to come back to rest on the shoulders of the fishing industry. This is in spite of the fact that the present state of the fishing industry is a result of circumstances created by development and a transfer of profit from one industry to another, often private or foreign interests, at the expense of the fishing community and fisheries resources.

Though there is a parallel to our industry, I don't wish to get in a debate on the failures in the timber industry as a result of trade dependency, but I would like to point out the mechanism for financing reforestation as I understand it. There are services that replant logged areas and provide significant employment that I believe is financed through stumpage fees. Despite the Laroche decision, I believe we can establish a similar process in the fishing industry to provide funding for enhancement and restoration of fisheries resources and habitat, as well as create jobs.

The government plans to use our children's money to stimulate the economy and create jobs, but it is the corporate interests that benefit and in the process will reduce jobs and try to lower wages and benefits. At the same time our fisheries resources continue to be exploited, habitat destroyed, and opportunities for fisheries jobs, benefits, enhancement, and even rehabilitation opportunities are ignored.

For those who agree or disagree with my opinions, I welcome your comments or debate. It is only through your support that I can continue to donate my time in what I believe are the best interests of the fishing industry. Letters of support are like a vote of confidence.

If I asked the question, do you support open pen fish farming, how many of you would take the time to write a few words or even just "no" on an email and send it to me?

If I asked, are you in favour of Premier Campbell's privatized, run of the river hydro projects, how many of you would be willing to write and say "no?" How many of you even know of the Campbell government giveaway of BC's rivers and streams to foreign power companies and the potentially devastating consequences to the environment, our economy and to our fisheries?

If asked you to contribute \$1 to advertise in the news media to bring public attention to the pending damage to our environment, fish and fish habitat raised in these questions, how many of you would just say "yes?" How many would just turn a blind eye and say "what's the use?"

This is why I organized and use the term Fishing For freedom. If we believe we have no control over our destiny, then we are slaves to our political system. Our current fisheries political policies are designed to keep us in small manageable herds by denying us industry-wide communication and transparency and it's up to us to change the process or continue to suffer the consequences.

So I remain transparent and request communication...

Cheers,

Gerald Dalum
www.fishingforfreedom.ca